

VZCZCXRO6471
RR RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #0185/01 0610955
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 020955Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9232
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 5637
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHHS/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000185

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE for EAP/MLS, PM/PPA, PM/RSAT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: Vietnam Supportive but Cautious on GPOI

HANOI 00000185 001.2 OF 002

11. (SBU) Summary: Meeting with Ministry of Defense and Foreign Affairs counterparts February 12, U.S. Pacific Command officials encouraged Vietnam to participate more actively in international peacekeeping operations through the GPOI program and reiterated the invitation for Vietnam to participate, not just observe, the upcoming Global Peace Operations (GPOI) exercise in Indonesia. They also pushed Vietnam to develop a coherent country plan for engaging in PKO-related training and activities. GVN officials expressed general support for GPOI, but asked the U.S. side to be patient, highlighting constitutional restrictions on deploying Vietnamese forces abroad as well as continuing deficiencies in manpower and English-language aptitude. The MOD confirmed that it would send four officers to Garuda Shield, but declined a request to have one of them participate in the command staff exercise. The GVN did, however, voice interest in training, conferences, and courses on international peacekeeping, and welcomed the upcoming March APCSS workshop as an opportunity to develop a country strategy for participating in international peacekeeping operations. End summary.

Legal Issues are the Primary Obstacle

12. (SBU) The PACOM team, headed by Robert Sweeney and accompanied by DAO officers and Poloff, met February 12 with the Director General of the MFA's Americas Division, Nguyen Ba Hung, and senior officials from the MOD External Relations Department, including Senior Colonel Nguyen Dinh Huy. In both meetings, Sweeney provided a detailed brief on GPOI, highlighting the international nature of the program and the fact that participation in GPOI does not necessarily obligate a country to provide peacekeeping forces. The U.S. side commented that as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Vietnam has an increased responsibility -- though not a legal obligation -- to assist with the Security Council's peacekeeping efforts. The team noted that countries with much smaller militaries, such as Fiji and Tonga, are making substantive contributions to PKO.

13. (SBU) The Vietnamese side repeated earlier arguments that a lack of capability and experience precludes more active involvement in peacekeeping operations; however, when pushed Sr. Col. Huy agreed that experience could be gained relatively quickly with tailored training. A lack of English language skills was a more serious problem, he said, but conceded that this was a hurdle that could also be overcome. The main obstacles to Vietnam's participation in peacekeeping operation are constitutional prohibitions against deploying forces overseas, both he and the DG Hung insisted. GVN officials emphasized that this was an issue that only the National Assembly could fully resolve, but said that the government would welcome increased cooperation short of actually deploying forces overseas. Speaking frankly, Sr. Col Huy said that what an activity

is called matters. "Training" is always an easier sell than "exercises," he said.

No Plan for International PKO . . .

14. (SBU) MOD officials admitted that the GVN does not have a coherent national plan for engaging in PKO-related activities, including GPOI. While the MFA International Organizations Department has the policy lead, the MOD has no assigned unit or entity to deal with PKO. Both MFA and MOD, however, expressed interest in PKO missions involving humanitarian assistance, logistics, transportation, medical programs, and demining. They readily agreed that it would make sense to put this in the form of a national plan and would be keen to participate in an upcoming international peacekeeping workshop sponsored by the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) to help the GVN develop its plans.

. . . But Eager for More Training

15. (SBU) The MOD noted that it had already participated in training courses in Nepal and Bangladesh, and confirmed that Vietnam is committed to sending more soldiers to UNPKO courses such as the UN Staff Officer Course, Logistics Course, and Observer Course. Noting their at-times cumbersome process for approving international cooperative activities, the officials requested that PACOM provide a yearly GPOI training schedule as soon in the year as possible. With sufficient advance notice, Vietnam could even host in-country GPOI PKO seminars, workshops, or training events. The PACOM team reviewed the schedule of upcoming GPOI events and emphasized that the United States welcomes Vietnam as a more active participant.

Observers Only for GARUDA SHIELD

HANOI 00000185 002.2 OF 002

16. (SBU) The PACOM team explained how GPOI is funded and stressed that Vietnam would be more competitive for GPOI's finite funds if it could demonstrate a firmer commitment to being a more active partner in GPOI training and exercises. Reiterating past U.S. requests for active participation in the June 2009 GPOI CAPSTONE Exercise GARUDA SHIELD in Indonesia, the team made a specific pitch for an officer to participate as a staff officer, not as an observer, in the staff exercise portion of GARUDA SHIELD and for an officer to be a participant in the leadership cell of the field training portion of the event.

17. (SBU) MOD responded that Vietnam is committed to sending four officers to GARUDA SHIELD as observers - one capable officer from its General Staff, one officer from its Special Forces, and two additional officers. However, MOD does not yet have a capable officer to be part of the exercise at GARUDA SHIELD due to differences in language, training, and experience. As a way to provide higher-level exposure the event, the PACOM team offered to fund a high-level visit by VM Military (General level) to visit the GARUDA SHIELD CAPSTONE event in Indonesia. MOD officials agreed to pass the invitation to their superiors.

MFA Advocates Increased IMET

18. (SBU) At the conclusion of the MFA meeting, DG Hung suggested that GPOI and IMET should go "hand in hand." For Vietnam to be able to do more, Hung suggested, it must be better trained; and to be better trained, Vietnam needs more IMET. DAO agreed that more training would be helpful, but noted that the more willing Vietnam is to participate actively, the better the case is for increased IMET funding.

Comment

19. (SBU) Despite the Prime Minister's commitment to GPOI last

summer, the MOD has not yet demonstrated the commitment and planning required to participate in PKO training, exercises, and eventual deployment. While political will apparently exists at the top, at least in principle, the MOD -- never the most nimble institution -- continues to struggle to shift its inward-looking military doctrine.

As one MOD official recently put it, "We don't do international cooperation on defense and security issues." In this sense, constitutional prohibitions on the deployment of forces overseas reflect an attitude that is still pervasive in the military. The MFA appears to be more open to cooperation and enjoys the backing of the Prime Minister, who has stated publicly that Vietnam will participate in peacekeeping-related activities. This has made it more difficult for the MOD to sit on its hands. The MOD increasingly appears to be finding itself in the position of having to participate in an effort it is still uncertain about or lose control of the planning process. We will continue to push for more active participation.

PALMER